

## The Crimea: election is response to everything

No. 34/235, September 24 2001

Two noteworthy things that happened in the Crimea last week, and the involvement of leading political figures clearly indicate the start of an election campaign, linked with (and pushed by) the possibility to settle complex tasks of division of political spheres of influence and power in the region in the near future.

### Something Old on Traditional Issue

The second meeting this year between President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma and members of the Council of Representatives of the Crimean Tatar People at the President of Ukraine took place on September 17. The meeting was traditionally attended by the top regional officials: speaker of the Crimean parliament Leonid Grach and newly-appointed head of the Crimean government Valery Gorbatov. The latter, by the way, was expected to comment publicly for the first time on opportunities to start the dialogue between his cabinet and representatives of the Crimean Tatar people.

Some time ago, commenting on the dismissal of the previous head of the Crimean government, Sergey Kunitsin, leader of the Crimean Tatar Medjlis Mustafa Dzhemilev noted that Kunitsin and the Medjlis had had «a number of agreements about solving certain issues». Some of the Crimean Tatar leaders still hope that the previous government's «traditions» will be followed by new government officials, as their comments addressed to Valery Gorbatov suggest. On July 27, Mustafa Dzhemilev said they had nothing special against Gorbatov «as a person» (Interfax-Ukraine, July 27, 2001). According to Dzhemilev, in the 1998 parliamentary elections Crimean Tatars even voted for Gorbatov, and a Crimean Tatar candidate even withdrew from the race in that constituency in favor of Gorbatov, as there was a threat that a Communist candidate could win over both of them. The issue is somewhat different: «to what extent Valery Gorbatov will be allowed to continue the traditions» of the Kunitsin government, deputy chairman of the Medjlis Refat Chubarov argues. That issue appears to be particularly complex, as Gorbatov received the position of the Crimean Prime Minister partly due to the support of Crimean Communists who have a rather specific opinion about ways of solving Crimean Tatars' issues in the region.

While the issues, addressed by the meeting with the president, were rather traditional, it is the pre-election time that brought them to the spotlight of attention. In addition to the sensitive issue of Crimean Tatars' access to distribution of land plots in the Crimea, one of key questions of the recent meeting was representation of Crimean Tatars in bodies of power. Notwithstanding numerous resolutions and documents designed to settle the matter, the situation remains largely unchanged. Traditional claims were repeated at the meeting: «I believe it important and timely to enhance the representation of the Crimean Tatar people in bodies of state power» - President Kuchma said, and added that «5 percent of the total number of civil servants in the autonomy is obviously too few» (UT-1, UT-Panorama, September 17, 2001). According to Kuchma, the problem could be addressed by means of improving the governance qualifications of Crimean Tatar candidates - for instance, in Kyiv. «Where else, if not in the capital, representatives of Crimean Tatars could feel better the pulse of the political life, deeply learn the work of central bodies of power, the technology of state decision-making.» While those skills were not the only one that could be obtained in Kyiv, under the circumstances that really could be a step towards better socialization of the Crimean Tatar governance and political elite into the Ukrainian political environment. That socialization, learning and new experience could also be useful for some of the present-day Crimean officials who obviously lack knowledge and experience of governance (but have the «useful» membership of the Communist party).

At the meeting with the Crimean Tatar representatives and the regional leadership, President Kuchma announced some of his ideas about the system of local elections - and, therefore, the fate of speculations about the possibility to introduce a proportional system of electing local councils. He stated he was strongly against the mixed (proportional-majoritarian) system of local elections, the elections of the Crimean authorities included. Commenting on the statement, head of the Medjlis

Mustafa Dzhemilev stressed: «that suits us to the extent to which the representation of Crimean Tatars is ensured» (Inter, Podrobnosti, September 17, 2001). Hence, the ways to ensure such representation should be found. Apparently, the more dynamic that process is the more stable the situation in the region is likely to be. According to deputy head of the Medjlis Refat Chubarov MP, «if the Crimean Tatars' demands are not satisfied, their reaction will be of a protest nature, will receive the forms of protest.» He added that «all will have to get down to the negotiations table before the elections». According to Refat Chubarov, seeking to ensure the representation of Crimean Tatars in the autonomy's parliament, «we observe counter-action by some of the Crimean leaders... primarily that position is traditional for the current leadership of the Crimean parliament».

The reaction of Crimean speaker Leonid Grach on the issue is not new: he is strongly against introduction of any mechanisms in the election law that would ensure representation of Crimean Tatars in elected bodies through so-called «nationality quotas». «The key threat of «nationality-based elections» is that the so-called elections of that kind can seriously destabilize the situation in the peninsula,» Grach argues (Krymskaya Pravda, September 20, 2001). He argued similarly in 1998, shortly before the 1998 parliamentary elections. Then none of the Crimean Tatar candidates was elected to the parliament of the autonomy, but the situation did not «stabilize». Instead, «Crimean Tatars have been excluded from the political process in the Autonomous Republic of the Crimea, for they have not received the status of its subject. Under the current circumstances their interests will actually be impossible to take into account,» Refat Chubarov argued. The question is how soon the parties will get to the negotiation table and how far they will go in search for coordinated solutions rather than keep imitating a dialogue.

#### Government Passions: Crimean Style

On September 19, 2001, the Crimean parliament also appeared to be looking for coordinated solutions, but practical results of the process were scarce, if any. Only 16 out of 30 members of the government were appointed as a result of the parliamentary debates.

Crimean Prime Minister Valery Gorbatov nominated his 23 candidates for the ministerial positions, but MPs voted down his nominees for the jobs of Minister of Economy and Minister of the Resorts and Tourism, as well as pretenders to occupy the positions of heads of the Committee for the Environment and Natural Resources, the Committee for Housing and Communal Services, the Committee for Forestry and Hunting. Acting Vice Prime Minister of the Crimea for the agrarian sector Vasyl Kiseliyov withdrew from the process after the formal nomination. Similarly, former Minister of Economy Hennady Hovorushchenko, nominated for the position of Minister of Industry of the Crimea, also withdrew.

According to Valery Gorbatov, practically all nominations were previously discussed with President Kuchma, and some of them did not find much positive reaction of the head of the state. Leonid Kuchma disapproved of some of his proposals, «two or three candidates», Gorbatov said. Given the Crimea's specific record of proliferation of organized crime, all nominees for positions in the autonomy's government had to be agreed with the Office of the Attorney General, the Security Service and the Ministry of the Interior.

Therefore, those who sought to form the Crimean government based only on the interests of Crimean political elites without considering outside interests, lost. The candidates to occupy the positions in the Crimean government were approved in the official Kyiv and screened by the law-enforcement authorities. This symptomatic fact demonstrated the capacity of the victorious political forces to make deals not only within the Crimean political environment, but also at the higher, Kyiv level. Obviously, not all of the nominees passed that test. Noteworthy, the political creation of a controversial Crimean power-broker Lev Mirimsky MP, leader of the Crimean branch of the Trudova Ukraina Volodymyr Tuterov (until recently Acting Vice Prime Minister of the Crimea) has not been formally nominated for the job of Vice Prime Minister of the Crimea, as originally expected. According to some observers, the appetites of the Trudova Ukraina in the Crimea have been noticeably reduced by inspections of the party's affiliates by law-enforcement authorities, and the consequences were rather sensitive. Valery Gorbatov publicly stated that he had refrained from nominating three candidates publicly as he had not received information about them from the law-enforcement bodies.

Nowadays the statistics of the Crimean «coalition government» are as follows: of 16 new members of

the government approved by the parliament to date there are 6 Communists and two members of the Trudova Ukraina.

Other political parties and their Crimean leaders also managed to get their shares of the Crimean power pie. 79 out of 100 members of the Crimean parliament voted for appointing their deputy colleague and chairman of the board of the Krymgaz JSC Anatoly Kotseruba to the position of Vice Prime Minister of the Crimea. Mr. Kotseruba is a confirmed supporter of the SDPU(o) and the former Crimean Prime Minister Anatoly Franchuk. The appointment gives Anatoly Franchuk an additional influence on the Crimean fuel and energy sector. Some time ago, Mr. Franchuk became the chairman of the supervisory board of the Krymgaz JSC, and his son Igor (who also happens to be ex-husband of President Kuchma's daughter, Olena, and father of the president's only grandson) got the position of chairman of the board of the state-owned Chornomornaftogaz oil and gas processing and trading JSC.

Four newly -appointed members of the Crimean government are members of the Crimean parliament. Noteworthy, unlike at the national level, where such combination of jobs is illegal, some of Crimean ministers do not resign as MPs, and some of the MPs also keep their positions in the government. Only 21 of Crimean MPs voted against such a combination of legislative and executive powers.

Crimean Communists and their allies are obvious leaders in the race for positions in the Crimean government. A Communist and member of the Crimean parliament Lentun Bezaziyev was appointed to the position of First Deputy Prime Minister of the Crimea. Another Communist, professor Vladimir Kazarin, chairman of the Council for Russian Culture at the Speaker of the Crimean parliament, became Deputy Prime Minister of the Crimea. The job of the Minister of Culture of the autonomy was given to yet another Communist, Mikhail Golubev. Communist Valentina Levina became the Minister of Culture, and Communist Vladimir Uzunov, previously top official of the Simferopol Institute of Economics and Management, became Crimean Minister of Finance. Noteworthy, the position of the head of the Crimean Committee for Information was given to Igor Azarov, former press secretary of the first (and last) Crimean president Yuri Meshkov.

Although not all of the candidates nominated by Valery Gorbatoev were approved by the Crimean parliament, Gorbatoev was not inclined to give up. «I am not going to give anybody away to please some political ambitions,» he stated, «what matters for me nowadays most of all is not politicizing the Council of Ministers, but solving economic issues.» Yet, given the pre-election period, it is unlikely that the process will go without being politicized. The new appointments to the top executive body of the Crimea, mainly Communists and their allies, will objectively benefit from the notorious «administrative resource». The key intrigue is that other political forces and related business elite will seek to use the relevant levers of influence too.

Hence, Crimean Communists and their supporters have succeeded in «capturing» the «bridges» and the «telegraph» for a victorious election campaign. Given the views, declared by the Crimean Communists, it is not difficult to predict that the key issues of the election campaign in the Crimea will include an aggressive information campaign about «the Crimean Tatar threat» and «Moslem extremism», with the emphasis on «the Russian idea» and the Russian language as an alternative. «Russians in the Crimea (or, more exactly, those who think in Russian regardless of their ethnic or partisan affiliation) ... exceed in their potential all other political forces on the peninsula taken together. If the Russians unite for the election period, ... others will only be in the role of dummies,» wrote Aleksey Chugayev, deputy head of the Russkoe Dvizhenie Kryma in an article published by the Krymskaya Pravda on September 19, 2001. Articles and statements with similar claims are in abundance in the Crimean media. They are now going to be fewer no matter what rules of the electoral game will be adopted in the peninsula. Meanwhile, an election law that would be a result of consensus rather than its imitation could have substantially reduced the influence of related negative trends on the Crimean society, particularly as far as the dilemma, described at the beginning of this piece, is concerned.